

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 L-03 H-01
PA-01 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 DODE-00 /057 W
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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1315

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 CARACAS 1820

WARNING NOTICE- SENSITIVE INTELLIGENCE SOURCES AND
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E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: PINT PINS SHUM VE
SUBJECT: UP-DATE: INSURGENCY IN VENEZUELA

REFS: (A) 77 CARACAS A-157, (B) 77 CARACAS 7403,
(C) 77 CARACAS A-104

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING THE NOVEMBER KILLING BY INSURGENTS
OF SIX NATIONAL GUARDSMEN, PRESIDENT PEREZ DECIDED TO
INCREASE THE PRESSURE ON THE INSURGENTS IN HE EASTERN
STATES BY SENDING ADDITIONAL TROOPS TO THE AREA. THE
RESULTS HAVE BEEN MIXED: SOME ARMS CACHES, A FEW LOW-
LEVEL INSURGENTS CAPTURED. THE PRESSUREHAS PROBABLY
FORCED THE INSURGENTS TO MOVE THEIR OPERATIONS SOUTHWESTWARD
TO ESCAPE THE SWEEPS BUT HAS NOT BROKEN THE INSURGENCY,
LONG ENDEMIC TO THE AREA. THE INSURGENCY HAS NOT DIS-
RUPTED THE ECONOMY OF THE AREA, AKEY INDICATOR POINTING
TO THE INSURGENTS' LIMITED POTENTIAL FOR CREATING INSTABILITY.
THE INCREASED MILITARY PRESENCE HAS LED TO REPORTS OF
HARASSMENT OF LOCAL CITIZENS, BUT NO MAJOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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VIOLATIONS HAVE BEEN PUBLICLY DOCUMENTED, NOR DOES THE
EMBASSY BELIEVE THE GOV WOULD UNDERTAKE SYSTEMATIC
REPRESSIVE MEASURES, GIVEN NOT ONLY THE LOW LEVEL OF THE
THREAT, BUT THE GOV'S STRONG ESPOUSAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS,
THE POTENTIAL EMBARRASSMENT TO THE GOV DURING THE ALREADY
ACTIVE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, AND THE LIKELIHOOD THAT SUCH
MEASURES WOULD NOT SERVE TO ERADICATE THE INSURGENTS IN

ANY CASE. THIS DOES NOT PRECLUDE INDIVIDUAL VIOLATIONS RECEIVING PUBLICITY, HOWEVER. THE INSURGENTS, THEN, WILL CONTINUE TO BE A MINOR IRRITANT IN TERMS OF NATIONAL OR EVEN REGIONAL STABILITY UNLESS, CONTRARY TO PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE, THE SECURITY FORCES MANAGE TO CAPTURE THEIR LEADERSHIP. END SUMMARY.

1. OPERATIONS IN THE FIELD. ON NOVEMBER 16, SIX NATIONAL GUARDSMEN WERE KILLED AND FIVE WOUNDED WHEN THE TRUCK ON WHICH THEY HAD HITCHED A RIDE WAS ATTACKED BY INSURGENTS ON AN ANZOATEGUI HIGHWAY. FOLLOWING THESE DEVELOPMENTS, THE ARMY, BEGAN A SWEEP IN ANZOATEGUI AND MONAGAS STATES. ON JANUARY 17, THREE VENEZUELAN SOLDIERS WERE WOUNDED IN TWO DIFFERENT CLASHES WITH INSURGENTS AND SOME LOW-LEVEL SUSPECTS WERE DETAINED. IN MID-JANUARY, THE SECURITY FORCES UNCOVERED SEVERAL SMALL ARMS DEPOTS AND CACHES IN ABANDONED CAMPS IN ANZOATEGUI AND MONAGAS. THESE DISCOVERIES WERE PUBLICLY CONFIRMED BY INTERIOR MINISTER LEPAGE, BUT HE GAVE NO DETAILS. ON JANUARY 25, A SMALL GROUP OF INSURGENTS SEIZED THE SMALL ANZOATEGUI TOWN OF CAMPO CLARO AND, USING TIME-HONORED TACTICS, HARANGUED THE CROWD FOR SEVERAL HOURS BEFORE DISAPPEARING. HOWEVER, THE INSURGENTS HAVE NOT ATTACKED MAJOR TOWNS OR CITIES NOR HAVE THEY DISRUPTED THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF THE AREA. THUS, WHILE CONTINUING LOW LEVEL OPERATIONS THEY HAVE, AT HIS JUNCTURE, VERY LIMITED POTENTIAL FOR CREATING
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INSTABILITY IN THE AREA, NOT TO MENTION THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE.

2. THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY STEPS UP THE PACE. INDICATIONS SUGGEST THAT PRESIDENT PEREZ, PROBABLY FOLLOWING THE AMBUSH OF THE GUARDSMEN IN NOVEMBER, DECIDED TO "UNLEASH" THE MILITARY, AT LEAST PARTIALLY. DAO BELIEVES THAT AS MANY AS ELEVEN BATTALIONS OF THE VENEZUELAN ARMY HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN SWEEPS AGAINST THE INSURGENTS, AND THERE IS SOME INDICATION THAT THESE SWEEPS MAY HAVE FORCED THE INSURGENTS TO MOVE SOUTHWESTWARD FROM THEIR "NORMAL" OPERATIONAL AREA IN THE MOUNTAINS OF NORTHEAST AND CENTRAL ANZOATEGUI AND MONAGAS. THE TECHNICAL JUDICIAL POLICE (PTJ) ARE ALSO WORKING WITH THE MILITARY, BUT WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT THEY HAVE BEEN GIVEN A SPECIAL ROLE OR THAT THEIR NUMBERS HAVE BEEN INCREASED SPECIFICALLY TO JOIN IN THE ANTI-INSURGENCY CAMPAIGN.

3. THE EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED REPORTS FROM VARIOUS SOURCES THAT THE INCREASED MILITARY ACTIVITY IN THE EAST HAS CAUSED CONSIDERABLE RESENTMENT AMONG THE LOCAL POPULACE, GOING BEYOND, IN FACT, THE TRADITIONAL SUSPICIONS OF A CIVILIAN

POPULATION TOWARDS MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THEIR MIDST.
INTELLIGENCE REPORTS RANGE FROM AN UNCONFIRMED REPORT THAT
A SENIOR VENEZUELAN SECURITY OFFICIAL MAY HAVE BEEN
AUTHORIZED TO ORGANIZE A "HIT SQUAD" TO SELECTIVELY
ASSASSINATE INHABITANTS BELIEVED TO BE COOPERATING WITH
THE INSURGENTS, TO LESS ALARMIST REPORTS THAT THE POPULATION
IS MERELY GIVING ACTIVE AID AND CONFORT TO THE
INSURGENTS. ANOTHER REPORT ALSO NOTES THAT THE ANTAGONIZED
LOCAL CITIZENRY BELIEVES ITSELF TO BE "OCCUPIED BY
FOREIGN TROOPS." EVEN THOUGH SOME AD HOC ABUSES MAY HAVE
OCCURED, THERE IS NO SATISFACTORY EVIDENCE TO INDICATE THAT
A "HIT SQUAD" HAS IN FACT BEEN DELIBERATELY AND SYSTEMATICALLY
ESTABLISHED, OR THAT IT WOULD HAVE THE APPROVAL OF PEREZ.
PEREZ' PUBLIC ESPOUSAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS,
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THE PERCEIVED LOW LEVEL OF THREAT, THE
ALMOST CERTAIN EXPOSURE AND THE LIKELIHOOD THAT ADVERSE
PUBLICITY WOULD EMBARRASS THE GOV AND THE AD CAMPAIGN,
ALL MAKE IT UNLIKELY THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD AUTHORIZE
OR CONDONE SUCH OPERATIONS. THE OTHER REPORTS, HOWEVER,
ALTHOUGH POSSIBLY EXAGGERATED IN THE TELLING, DO
UNDOUBTEDLY REFLECT HEAVY-HANDED REPRESSIVE MEASURES,
MOSTLY SYSTEMATIC HARASSMENT OF SUSPECTED INDIVIDUALS
WHICH COULD SURFACE PUBLICLY.

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 L-03 H-01

CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 DODE-00 PA-01 /057 W

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1316

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 CARACAS 1820

WARNING NOTICE- SENSITIVE INTELLIGENCE SOURCES AND
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4. INSURGENCY AS A CAMPAIGN THEME. HISTORICALLY, BOTH
AD AND COPEI USED STRONG EXTRA-JUDICIAL MEASURES ABAINST
THE GURELLILLAS IN THE 1960'S, AND THERE ARE PLENTY OF
SKELETONS ABOUT. THUS BOTH MAJOR PARTIES, AND THE GOV
ITSELF, TEND TO PLAY THIS ISSUE WIT GREAT DISCRETION.
NOT ONLY DOES THE GOV FOR THE MOST PART DENY THE POLITICAL
MOTIVATION OF THE INSURGENTS, BUT GOV SPOKESMEN (MINISTERS
OF DEFENSE ANDINTERIOR) REGULARLY FAIL TO PROVIDE
DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT EH INSURGENTS' OPEATIONS,
GOVERNMENT COUNTERMEASURES, OR THE LOCAL REACTION TO THESE
DEVELOPMENTS. ALL OF THIS LENDS AN AIR OF MYSTERY TO THE
INSURGENCY WHICH MAKE IT APPEAR MORE OMINOUS THAN
IT REALLY IS. IN ADDITION, COPEI PARTYPOLITICIANS TELL
US THAT THE GOV SHOULD APPLY A "SELECTIVE POLICY" OF
REPRESSION, GOING AFTERONLY THOSE WHOM IT HAS GOOD REASON
TO BELIEVE ARE REALLY SUPPORTING THE GUERRILLAS. OTHERWISE,
THE PETTY HARASSMENT OF LOCAL CITIZENS MERELY PLAYS INTO
THE INSURGENCTS' HANDS. MOST SPECIFICALLY, A COPEYANO
OBSERVER HAS POINTED OUT THAT COPEI PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE
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LUIS HERRERA CAMPINS' PUBLIC REFERENCE (ON OCTOBER 31)
TO THE POTENTIAL "ARGENTINIZATION" OF VENEZUELA WAS A
SPECIFIC WARNING ABOUT THIS POINT. THUS THE EMBASSY'S
ASSESSMENT IS THAT, BARRING A MAJOR HUMAN RIGHTS SCANDAL,
OR A WELL-ORGANIZED URBAN KIDNAPPING (A LA NIEHOUS),
THE COPEYANO OPPOSITON WILL PROBABLY MAKE ONLY PASSING
REFERENCE TO THE INSURGENCY DILEMMA.

5. CONCLUSION. IN SUM, THE INSURGENCY CONTINUES, ALBEIT
AT A SLIGHTLY REDICED SCALE FROMSIX MONTHS AGO. IT
WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE FO THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, WITH
OCCASIONAL SEIZURES OF SMALL TOWNS AND SHOOT-OUTS WITH THE
MILITARY, UNLESS THE MILITARY MANAGE TO FIND THE INSURGENTS'
LEADERS. THIS IS NOT PROBABLE, GIVEN ITS TRACK RECORD
TO DATE. BUT THE VERY LIMITED NUMBERS OF INSURGENTS
(PROBABLY LESS THAN 150, SEE 77 A-104) POSE NO THREAT,
EITHER TO THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT, NOR TO THE STABILITY
(OR ECONOMIC LFE) OF THE REGION. THEIR CONTINUED PRESENCE
AND OPERATIONS, WHILE EMBARRASSING TO THE GOV AND TO
THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY, WILL PROBABLY NOT VECOME A SIGNIFICANT
ELECTION CAMPAIGN ISSUE, BARRING MAJOR HUMAN RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS. THE MILITARY DOES HAVE REAL CONSTRAINTS, IN
TEMS OF BOTH THE NUMBERS OF MEN IT CAN FIELD, AND THE
LEVEL OF REPRESSION THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL PERMIT.

WHIE NOT PROBABLY, ADVERSE PUBLICITY COULD BE GENERATED
SHOULD OVERZEALOUS SECURITY FORCES TURN TO SYSTEMATIC
REPRESSIVEMEASURES IN AN EFFORTTO OBTAIN INFORMATION
ABOUT THE LOCATION AND IDENTITY OF THEINSURGENTS FROM
THE LOCAL POPULACE. FOR ALL THESE FACTORS THEN, WE DO
NOT FORESEE A FEFINITIVE RESOLUTION TO THE EASTERN INSURGENCY
PROBLEM DURING THE REMAINING TENURE OF PRESIDENT PEREZ,
HOWEVER MUCH HE WOULD LIKE TO ELIMINATE THIS PARTICULAR
PROBLEM FROM AMONG THE MANY BEFORE HIM AND THE NEXT
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Message Attributes

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